

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: Tom Bill Black

DATE OF BIRTH: November 19, 1954 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: March 5, 2012

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: N.M. Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum

INTERVIEWER: Donna M. Wojcik

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM

TRANSCRIBED: September 14, 2013

NUMBER OF TAPES: Three

ABTRACTOR: Donna M. Wojcik

DATE ABSTRACTED: March 15, 2012

RECORDING QUALITY (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Black discusses ranch life and working on a ranch prior to a career as a livestock inspector for the N.M. Livestock Board. He describes his job in the field, and as a supervisor. He is also a graduate of auctioneer school.

DATE RANGE: 1954-2001

ABSTRACT (Important Topics in Order of Appearance):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Black's grandfather came to New Mexico in the 1940s when he was transferred by Safeway Inc. from El Paso, Tex., to Deming where he managed the first Safeway store in Deming. He was a meat cutter by trade, did custom dirt work with a team of mules, and traded and sold horses. He also leased ranches. Black's father lived and worked on ranches until he went to work for the N.M. Livestock Board in 1962. Black grew up on ranches until he was about fourteen years old. His aunt and uncle worked for Bob Cloudt on the Tigner Ranch between Deming and Silver City. Black got a job working for Sherwood Culberson on a ranch north of Lordsburg. His aunt and uncle also worked for Culberson.

Black describes both the fifty-section Tigner Ranch and the more than 200-section ranch owned by Culberson, which was made up of five ranches purchased by Culberson. Both ranches raised crossbred cattle. He does not recall any losses as a result of adverse weather conditions or any bad droughts like the ones during the Great Depression. It was hot and dry. During branding in the summer they only worked until noon because the heat was too hard on the cattle, horses and cowboys.

He describes a round of work throughout the year. Windmill repairs and water issues were always a priority and would be dealt with immediately, however there were some chores that could be left until times when the cowboys were not so busy. Extra labor was hired when needed, especially during branding time. Ranchers would often cut down their herd or sell older cows when conditions were really dry. At branding time, cattle were given a vaccination for black leg, castrated, branded, ear marked, and given medicine for ear ticks.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Ranchers do everything that needs to be done to the calves at the same time they are branded to minimize stress on the calves. "Calves do better if you just leave them alone," says Black. He recalls that he began doing chores when he was "old enough to walk." At age seven or eight he took care of the horses and dogie calves, and milked the cow. He began doing the work of an adult around age fourteen, which was when he started working as a cowboy during the summer months. He was paid five dollars a day plus room and board. Cowboys did their own laundry and shod their own horses. "I did the duties of every other cowboy." He does not recall any serious accidents but does remember being kicked in the mouth by a calf. Roads into windmills and water sources were always kept in good condition.

Meal times did not bring much variety. Breakfast consisted of eggs, biscuits, gravy, bacon, sausage meat or fresh side meat, and pan-fried potatoes. There were always biscuits and gravy at every meal, lots of beans, and iced tea. Corrals were usually located near a residence at one of the various locations on the ranch, so they generally ate their noon and supper meals there.

Black describes leisure activities such as swimming, hunting, or reading. He graduated from school in Deming. He believes the quality of life on a ranch was better in past years because it was a more simple way of life. He feels that the computer age has taken away from the cowboy lifestyle. When asked what he believes the future holds for ranching, he states that we will always need ranching although he is concerned about water issues.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

Ranchers need to keep up with technology because ranching is done differently now. He feels that family-run ranches are no longer economical because they cannot raise enough cattle to justify the costs. Ranching is becoming a side business for corporate ownership, and ranch land is being sold off as suburbia moves outward.

Black served as a livestock inspector for the N.M. Livestock Board; he describes their primary function as inspecting cattle and monitoring livestock movement, making sure that livestock is branded for ownership and meets health requirements, testing for disease, imposing quarantines on diseased animals, and controlling rustling and animal abuse. Black graduated from the law enforcement academy in 1976. He was hired as an inspector and stationed in Clovis for three years. He was transferred to Deming in 1978 and worked there for five years under his dad as supervisor. He became an area supervisor in 1997, overseeing eleven inspectors in seven districts. He discusses the differences between livestock inspectors and brand inspectors.

There are three kinds of inspections; when livestock are moved from district to district, when they are moved out of the state, and when they are moved into the state. "It is important to keep our state clean of infectious disease," he says. New Mexico is a mandatory-brand state. When calves are weaned from their mothers their brand should be "peeled and haired." If a calf is not yet weaned, it is not required to be branded because it is still paired with its mama, who must be branded.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

Other states want to follow our state brand-law system. Equine rescue facilities and the wild horse program controversy are briefly discussed. All animals without a brand are considered "estrays" and as such belong to the State. Animals considered "estrays" are sold unless someone claims them and can prove ownership.

The New Mexico Livestock Board is self-supporting, with all monies generated from inspection fees, brand recording fees, and other programs. Inspectors can check for brands anytime cattle are moved out of a district. If imported animals are found to be without brands, they must be branded before they can be further moved. Sheep are branded with paint brands and an earmark. Brands must be issued and recorded with the Livestock Board before they can be used. The brand becomes the property of the person it is registered to and can be sold just like any other private property.

At livestock auctions, everything that goes into the auction must be inspected, and everything that sells must be inspected for health and brands. If a sale barn does not have a Livestock Board license, it cannot hold an auction.

TAPE THREE, SIDE A:

If diseased cattle are found during an inspection, the animals are quarantined and tested. Once disease is confirmed, the USDA steps in. Owners of diseased cattle must keep the quarantine, follow state procedures, and allow the inspectors to do what they need to do. If they do not cooperate, they can be brought up on criminal charges or put out of business. In cases of disease, any animal that has had contact with the infected cattle are quarantined, even if the cattle are on a ranch that abuts the one where the disease is found. In cases where the disease does not affect

the meat, infected animals are often killed and sent to slaughter facilities. When infected cattle are transported to a slaughter facility a USDA inspector seals the animals in a trailer. A USDA inspector breaks the seal at the destination and completes the paperwork that goes with the cattle.

The movement of cattle through New Mexico is briefly discussed. The Department of Agriculture inspects privately owned weigh scales to ensure that they are correct. A rancher may hire an independent company for scale inspection if they choose. In recent years, county deputies have been escorting inspectors as they perform their duties because threats are made against the inspectors; some people are anti-government, and in cases where a criminal arrest must be made it is wise to take a deputy as backup. There have been times when Black has feared for his safety while performing his duties. “Never mess with a man over three things — water, fences, and land.”

All animals going into a county fair must be inspected if you are crossing your county or district line. If you are going to another state to attend a fair, you must meet both state of origin and state of destination laws. This includes cattle, sheep, horses and goats. Chickens, rabbits and other animals are under the Department of Agriculture’s control. County fairs are concentration points for diseases, where contact can easily spread the disease. Black recalls one rodeo in Silver City that was shut down due to diseased horses and the fear of spreading the disease.

TAPE THREE, SIDE B:

The requirements needed to bring cattle into New Mexico are discussed. The inspection of animals at slaughter facilities is revisited. The humane treatment and handling of livestock such as cattle, horses, sheep, and goats is discussed. Many people do not intentionally mistreat their livestock but genuinely do not understand what the animals need to survive. Livestock inspectors try to work with ranchers to educate them as much as they can but they are limited in funds and manpower to do it on a large scale.

His job as supervisor was more administrative than field work, involving checking paperwork turned in by inspectors, making sure they did their job, and testing and hiring new inspectors. Black is a member of the Western State Livestock Investigators Association and the International Livestock Identification Association. In addition to his career on the Livestock Board, he is also an auctioneer. He attended auctioneer school, has done auctions for livestock, farm equipment, antiques, and vehicles. He gives an example of his auctioneer “chant.” Black says that the computer age has decreased the number of live auctions around the country because buyers can bid, see what others are bidding, and purchase on-line.